

DENNISON TAVERN
(Juniata Crossings Tavern)
South of U.S. 30 and the
Raystown branch of the Juniata River
Breezewood vicinity
Bedford County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6147

HABS
PA
5-BREZWV,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HABS
PA
5-BREZW.V,
1-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

DENNISON TAVERN (Juniata Crossings Tavern)

HABS No. PA-6147

Location: 1 mile W of Breezewood, S of where U.S.
30 now spans the Raystown branch of the
Juniata River
Breezewood (vic.)
Bedford County
Pennsylvania

Date of Construction: 1818

Present Owner: unknown

Present Use: residence

Significance: This tavern stands along the former
Chambersburg-Bedford Turnpike, at
Juniata Crossings, a heavily used east-
west route throughout the nineteenth and
early twentieth century.

Historian: Scott C. Brown, 1991; Kim E. Wallace,
1994

Project Information: The results of the study of Bedford
County were published in 1994: Kim E.
Wallace (ed), Bedford County and Fulton
County, Pennsylvania: An Inventory of
Historic Engineering and Industrial
Sites (Washington, D.C.: National Park
Service). The contents of the
publication were transmitted to the
Library of Congress as individual
reports. Research notes, field photos
and copies of historic photos collected
during the project were transmitted to
the AIHP Collection, Special
Collections, Stapleton Library, Indiana
University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA
15705.

This tavern, a three-and-one-half story building with random-range stone walls and a two story front porch, stands at Juniata Crossings, a heavily used crossing of Juniata River's Raystown Branch on the Chambersburg-Bedford Turnpike. Parts of the eastern and western abutments and two stone piers are the only remnants of the covered bridge that spanned the river near the tavern. The western stone abutment is barely visible, but the westernmost pier is slightly more intact. About 100' towards the river are the more substantial remains of the central pier, constructed of thinly cut stones. Rounded on one end and squared on the other, the remains of the pier measure approximately 10' high x 6' wide at the base. Traces of the eastern abutment are visible on the other side of the river.

The east-west route opened across Pennsylvania during the mid-eighteenth-century military campaigns had relatively few river crossings. The Raystown branch of the Juniata River was the only major crossing between Pittsburgh and the Susquehanna River at Harrisburg. A stockade overlooking the river was built in 1758 and served briefly as a fortified shelter between Forts Littleton and Raystown. The stockade was described as deteriorated by 1763. During periods of low water the river could be forded, but a ferry was maintained here at various times. James Martin reportedly was one of the first ferrymen. A traveler over the route in 1797 noted that a German immigrant named Thiel ran the ferry and a nearby tavern.

The Juniata Crossings covered bridge was the second bridge to span the Juniata River at this site. It was preceded by a chain bridge, but sources vary on when this was built. At least one dates it to the 1758 Forbes campaign against the French at Fort Duquesne. Others place it later in the eighteenth century. The chain bridge was remembered in the 1884 county history as "a novelty, celebrated far and wide. In place of cables, as in modern suspension bridges, huge chains spanned the river, and were fastened, on the one side to the natural rocks, and on the other to a stone pier." The remains of the stone pier were once visible downriver (north) from the present concrete highway bridge, and according to local history, wagon ruts cut in the rock are still visible descending to the river near this site. The chain bridge was replaced in 1818, when the Chambersburg and Bedford Turnpike Company built the Juniata Crossings covered bridge. Hugh Dennison built the large stone tavern facing the road on the river's west bank in the same year.

The covered bridge at Juniata Crossings was notable for its length and for having two lanes 11'-6" wide. It was constructed with a central pier supporting two burr arch spans reaching a total of 368' across the river. The bridge was damaged, according to different sources, either by an ice floe in 1884 or

1885 or by the flood of 1889, and the western half was rebuilt as a single lane. On January 1, 1931, the state highway department opened a new concrete bridge about 300 yards north of the covered bridge and relocated the Lincoln Highway to pass behind the stone tavern called the Juniata Crossings Hotel. The massive covered bridge was closed and was destroyed by floodwaters in 1936.

Sources:

- Blackburn, E. Howard, and William H. Welfley. History of Bedford and Somerset Counties, Pennsylvania. 3 vols. New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1906.
- Blackwelder, John H. "Three Crossings of the Juniata."
Unidentified Bedford newspaper clipping. May 29, 1930. PHS.
The History of East Providence Township.
- Jordan, William A., ed. The Official Program of the 1971 Bicentennial. Bedford, Pa.: 1971.
- Stotz, Charles M. The Architectural Heritage of Early Western Pennsylvania. Orig. pub. 1936. Reprint, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1966.
- Stotz, Charles M. Outposts of the War for Empire: The French and English in Western Pennsylvania: Their Armies, Their Forts, Their People, 1749-64. Pittsburgh, Pa.: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, 1985.
- Waterman, Watkins & Co. History of Bedford, Somerset and Fulton Counties, Pennsylvania. Chicago: Waterman, Watkins & Co., 1884.